In this issue:
- **USDA.gov Prototype is Ready for Prime Time**
- **USDA Pushes Forward On GPEA**
- **GSA Launches USA Services**
- **Recruitment One Stop Launches Next Phase of USAJOBS**

USDA.gov Prototype is Ready for Prime Time

USDA, through a partnership with several agencies and USDA business partners, developed a proof of concept Prototype to illustrate the value of implementing USDA's Smart Choice eGovernment Initiatives. The Prototype was built by teams from several agencies and business partners and shows how USDA can better serve and interact with its stakeholders (customers, partners, employees, and other Government Agencies). It supports the vision described in the eGovernment Strategic Plan.

The Prototype supports many types of users. They include farmers, business partners, employees and executives. It provides secure access to business-critical services and information for all users, while creating a personalized environment fulfilling the day-to-day needs of each individual. From eLearning initiatives and geospatial mapping to project and time management tools, the Prototype shows how the new USDA.gov portal will support the needs and responsibilities of its vast audience.

Demonstrating technologies that enable users to operate more efficiently and economically, the Prototype serves as an example of how inter-agency cooperation can help address customer needs. As USDA stakeholders experience the Prototype, they will learn how new technologies and information resources can be used to improve their interactions with the Department. This model will help program managers and agency leaders understand how technology can enhance their business operations by fostering discussion about changing business processes and the positive impacts of those changes.

You will soon get the opportunity to see the Prototype as part of a presentation to a number of eGovernment and leadership groups across the Department. Additionally, look for a demonstration at the Technology Fair on October 22 and 23 on the Patio in the Whitten Building. The Prototype will also be available online for USDA employees to "drive" it themselves. An online comment tool will allow you to tell us what you think about it.

For more information on the USDA.gov Prototype, please contact the eGovernment Team.

USDA Pushes Forward On GPEA

Enacted in 1998, the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA) requires all Federal Agencies to provide individuals or entities that deal with the Agency with the option to submit information or transact business electronically. Now, 5 years later, the GPEA compliance deadline of October 21, 2003, is rapidly approaching. In October 2000 USDA, like all other Federal Departments, submitted a baseline GPEA implementation plan to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Since submission of the initial plan, the USDA Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) has included GPEA compliance as a key component of the Department's eGovernment Program and worked closely with USDA agencies to educate them on the requirements of the law and coordinate annual updates to their GPEA compliance plans.

USDA's most recent progress report on implementing GPEA was submitted to OMB on July 1, 2003. It indicated that USDA will offer electronic alternatives for conducting business for 35 percent of its interactions with the public by the October 2003 compliance date. Despite this relatively low number, OMB's recent feedback suggested that the agency has developed a "strong foundation for moving forward" and mentioned USDA's "substantial progress since the FY02 report". In particular, the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) GPEA compliance effort was highlighted as part of a recent Federal Computer Week story: http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2003/0908/mgt-paper-09-08-03.asp

Still, many USDA agencies must take a series of steps to prepare electronic options for many of their transactions and to address any authentication and security issues that go along with these new solutions prior to the GPEA deadline. Additionally, the majority of USDA agencies will need to make GPEA compliance a priority beyond October 2003 and continue to work diligently to meet the commitments they documented in the most recent report to OMB. To assist in these efforts, OCIO has prepared and distributed checklists to assist USDA agencies in identifying all the necessary steps to provide electronic options and to track progress on all GPEA compliance efforts. Additionally, OCIO's coordination of the Department's GPEA compliance efforts remains tightly integrated with the USDA eAuthentication Solution currently under development. Over the past few weeks, several USDA agencies integrated applications with the USDA's WebCAAF, which will allow them to provide their customers with the appropriate level of security for their electronic forms and other transactions. With the October 21 deadline only weeks away, and much work left to be done, OCIO will continue to work with USDA agencies to address the requirements of GPEA.

For more information on GPEA, please contact the eGovernment Team.

GSA Launches USA Services

On July 30, 2003, the General Services Administration (GSA) and the OMB formally launched USA Services, the Presidential eGovernment Initiative that pledges to provide citizens with responses to all their Web, e-mail, and telephone inquiries within 2 business days. By leveraging partnerships with 12 Federal Agencies, including USDA, USA Services is not only improving citizen customer service, but also developing Government-wide standards, performance metrics, and best practices for customer service. The new support technologies, applications, management services, and infrastructures to assist in citizen response services will allow participating Agencies to increase and expand the quality and quantity of services they offer to the public, lower expenses on customer service technology and, most importantly, redirect resources back to core missions.

USA Services serves as the official multi-channel front door to Federal information and services to citizens. Its charter is to improve the delivery of information and services while affecting significant Government efficiencies. These benefits will be achieved by creating a single point of contact for citizens where information for all Federal agencies can be consolidated and disseminated.

GSA and OMB built USA Services based on the successes of three current information channels, each of which is providing comprehensive access to Federal information and services within its particular medium: www.FirstGov.gov (for Web services); the National Contact Center at 1-800-FED-INFO (for telephone and e-mail services); and the Federal Citizen Information Center in Pueblo, Colorado (for publications).

In preparation for the launch, GSA's Office of Citizens Services and Communications met with partner Agencies to develop lists of answers to frequently asked questions. This information equipped the customer service center to address the majority of Agency inquiries, saving time and allowing participating Agencies to focus on other priorities. To test USA Services, GSA set up a month-long pilot with the Department of the Interior (DOI). During this time, the Call Center received approximately 300 e-mail messages and 50 phone calls a day and was able to resolve 95 percent of the inquiries. The remaining inquiries were redirected to DOI experts.

Although citizens can still contact Government Agencies directly, USA Services will be the centerpiece of the citizen-centered Government. By facilitating streamlined communication venues for citizens to contact the Government, GSA will enable Federal Agencies to deliver on the Presidential Initiative promise of dramatically improving citizen access to timely, reliable, and secure information.

For more information on USA Services, please visit: http://www.gsa.gov

Recruitment One Stop Launches Next Phase of USAJOBS

In recent years, many job applicants complained that they received little or no feedback from Federal Agencies after submitting résumés and employment forms. Additional criticism has focused on a complicated and inefficient recruiting and hiring process. In a recent report, the Merit Systems Protection Board found that at least half of the Government's job postings were poorly written and tended to be legalistic, stilted and hard to comprehend. To address these challenges, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) recently released Module 2 of their USAJOBS Web site, the cornerstone of OPM's Recruitment One Stop (ROS) eGovernment Initiative. The new site allows users to provide feedback and submit suggestions on how to improve the site's functions. This phased rollout method will further test internal capacities and permit time to troubleshoot problems that may arise prior to the final implementation of Module 3.

Driven by the need to hire several hundred thousand employees in the upcoming years to fill vacancies expected by an upcoming wave of retirements, ROS intends to provide a single application for Federal job seekers that incorporates standardized vacancy information, basic job application submission and application status tracking capability. As the Federal Government's primary means of communicating with potential employees, the USAJOBS.opm.gov portal will be a seamless one-stop recruiting venue for Federal jobs. Under new OPM procedures, candidates will use a 'create once, submit many' job application on the USAJOBS Web site and Federal Agencies, including USDA, will no longer require candidates to create separate résumés on their own job sites. The updated version of the Web site includes a redesigned user interface that leverages the best practices of industry leading recruitment Web sites to simplify site navigation on the enhanced job search engine. Recent results are encouraging with 3,028,644 visitors to the USAJOBS site from August 4 through August 20, 40 million viewed pages, and a total of 51, 661 résumés created.

Moving forward, OPM is committed to successfully integrating the front end of the recruiting process with new back end hiring tools. In addition to improved services and features for Federal job seekers, ROS will also provide improvements in functionality for Federal Human Resources (HR) offices such as the standardization of technology and process requirements. Upon full realization of the ROS enhancements, OPM will become a step closer to meeting its goal of positioning the Federal Government as the first stop for job seekers and eliminating unnecessary legal and regulatory constraints to effective recruitment.

For more information on USAJOBS Web site or Recruitment One Stop, please visit: http://www.opm.gov/index.asp

For more information on any of these topics, or for general comments or questions, contact the eGovernment Team at:
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